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COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All media continued to report on the aftermath of the alleged incursion of Israeli planes into Syrian air space. Ha'aretz and other media reported that Syrian FM Walid Mualem told EU ambassadors in Damascus that he expected to lodge a complaint with the UN

Security Council in the coming days. Mualem traveled later to Turkey, where he is expected to discuss the alleged airspace violation with Turkish officials. On Sunday major media reported that Turkey has asked Israel for clarifications after finding two fuel tanks on its territory near the Syrian border. Israel Radio quoted Mualem as saying that Syria is prepared to defend itself but that it is looking forward to peace. Major media quoted Defense Minister Ehud Barak as saying at Sunday's cabinet meeting that the IDF conducts "courageous and unusual operations," adding, "This is an activity that naturally cannot always be revealed to the public."

The Jerusalem Post quoted a senior Israeli defense official as saying on Sunday that the mounting tension between Israel and Syria has started to subside. Leading media noted that the Arab world is keeping silent on the issue. On Sunday Yediot quoted senior Iranian officials as saying that Islamic states would back Syria.

Leading media reported that PM Ehud Olmert is scheduled to meet with PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas in Jerusalem today. Ha'aretz quoted Palestinian sources as saying that Abbas will press Olmert to begin drafting a document of principles that will be presented at the international meeting in the fall,. Ha'aretz said that Olmert prefers a one-page document that lists five general principles that will serve as guidelines. Israel Radio reported that Knesset Speaker Dalia Itzik met with Palestinian PM Salam Fayyad at her residence. The radio quoted Fayyad as saying in an interview with a Saudi newspaper that the failure of the international Mideast meeting would have far-reaching consequences for the entire region and that agreement on the core final-status issues must be reached before the meeting. On Sunday Maariv reported that for the first time in the history of relations between Israel and the Palestinians, Abbas has been invited to address the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. The invitation was given by the committee's Chairman, MK Tzachi Hanegbi. The Jerusalem Post reported that a high-ranking Israeli defense official told the newspaper on Sunday that the IDF and the Shin Bet are vehemently opposed to removing roadblocks in the West Bank as a goodwill gesture to the Palestinians. The official was quoted as saying that the defense establishment first wants the Palestinians to prove their capabilities in combating terrorism in the West Bank.

On Sunday the media (banner in Maariv) quoted Palestinian sources as saying that IDF special forces kidnapped Muhamash el-Kadi Nuimat (a.k.a. Abu-Khaled), a Hamas official, out of the southern Gaza Strip on Friday evening. According to Maariv, he was "recently appointed the commander of Hamas's military wing in the southern Gaza Strip. In this capacity he is responsible, among other things, for the arms smuggling operations from Egypt and he has extensive knowledge about the state of the kidnapped soldier.Q Coverage was less intensive in other media.

Ha'aretz reported that on Sunday King Abdullah II of Jordan conferred with the Middle East Quartet's envoy, Tony Blair, and pledged his country's support for the group's efforts to shore up confidence between Israel and the Palestinians, according to an official statement.

On Sunday The Jerusalem Post and other media reported that, buoyed by the growing street protests against Hamas, Fatah leaders vowed over the weekend to step up their efforts to end Hamas's rule in the Gaza Strip.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Wesley Clark, former NATO supreme allied commander and 2004 Democratic Party presidential candidate, told the newspaper on the sidelines of this week's counterterrorism conference at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya that the US should embark on a diplomatic offensive with Iran before it is too late and the only alternative left is war.

Maariv reported that various security branches advocate distributing biochemical protection kits to the Israeli population, but that Barak is opposed to such a move.

On Sunday The Jerusalem Post reported that on Thursday the US Senate passed its version of the foreign aid bill, which includes USD 2.4 billion for Israel and USD 1.3 billion for Egypt.

On Sunday all media reported on Osama bin Ladin's first video appearance in five years.

Ha'aretz reported that Iran plans to vie for one of the temporary seats on the UN Security Council, according to a low-key announcement last week in a routine informational document distributed by the Asia Group of member states. The newspaper quoted diplomats at UN Headquarters in New York as saying that Iran has little chance of beating Japan, particularly in view of the Security Council sanctions imposed on Iran for refusing to halt its nuclear program.

Leading media reported that on Sunday the IDF thwarted a suicide bombing in Tel Aviv, arresting a Palestinian youth who was carrying three explosive devices at the Beit Iba checkpoint on the outskirts of Nablus. Earlier on Sunday, a Qassam rocket struck an open area near a kibbutz in the Sha'ar Hanegev Regional Council. Also on Sunday, Palestinian militants fired four mortar shells at Kibbutz Kerem Shalom near southern Gaza.

Ha'aretz reported that on Sunday members of the Committee to Prevent the Destruction of Temple Mount Antiquities petitioned the High Court of Justice, seeking to stop an excavation by the Waqf on the Temple Mount. The petition is against PM Olmert, other cabinet ministers, and the Israel Antiquities Authority. It was signed, among others, by prominent author A. B. Yehoshua; former Tel Aviv mayor Shlomo Lahat; Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations; prominent archaeologists; and The Jerusalem Post, which also claimed that the Mount is closed to media coverage.

Ha'aretz reported that on Sunday Jordanian authorities prevented the head of the northern branch of Israel's Islamic Movement, Sheikh Raed Salah, from entering Jordan. The Jordanians did not give a reason for barring Salah entry. On Sunday The Jerusalem Post reported that on Friday Salah reiterated his promise that Israel would disappear.

On Sunday The Jerusalem Post reported that a UN conference on joint water management strategies in the Middle East convened in New York this week. The workshop was sponsored by Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America.

On Sunday The Jerusalem Post printed an AP wire report that the US would cut off funding to the UN Human Rights Council under a bill passed by the Senate, the latest action by Washington to target an agency it has harshly criticized since its creation last year. The Jerusalem Post reported that fertility experts in Iran, Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, Cyprus, and Israel have cooperated with reproductive endocrinologist Dr. Eric Scott Sills of New York's RMA-Vassar Brothers Medical Center, to publish what is reportedly the first ever collaborative study on in-vitro fertilization services in the Middle East.

Major media reported that Likud Chairman Binyamin Netanyahu told the Winograd Commission that the decision to go to war in July 2006 was made hastily.

Over the weekend all media reported that a month ago the police arrested eight Petah-Tikva youths -- immigrants from the former Soviet Union -- suspected of running a neo-Nazi cell. The suspects attacked Jewish men wearing skullcaps, foreign workers, homosexuals, and drug addicts, and filmed their acts of abuse.

The Jerusalem Post wrote that the Economic Intelligence Unit reported on Sunday that Israel was ranked the 23rd most attractive country in which to do business over the next five years.

11. Mideast:

Summary:

Military correspondent Amos Harel wrote on page one of the

independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "It is safe to assume that Assad will make some sort of move to keep Israel on the edge of its seat over the [upcoming Jewish] holidays."

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: "Only the government leaders in Israel are keeping silent.... One may assume that the welcome silence of the weekend will not last long."

Defense commentator Amir Oren wrote in Ha'aretz: "The present crisis may blow over, but the fragile nature of relations between Israel and Syria will continue threatening to ignite at any moment. Although war did not break out, joy is premature: No basic problem

has been solved. To move ahead to a solution, talk, not silence, is needed."

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in Ha'aretz: "No military operation -- not even a victory -- can take the place of a diplomatic agreement."

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote in Yediot Aharonot: "The Syrians are not yet prepared for war.... In the meantime, they can promote terrorism in the territories."

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in The Jerusalem Post: "Policy must be tough, cynical, and involve equal trade-offs, rather than proofs of good will or flattery designed to win friends."

Block Quotes:

II. "Tense Holiday Season"

Military correspondent Amos Harel wrote on page one of the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (9/10): "It is safe to assume that Assad will make some sort of move to keep Israel on the edge of its seat over the holidays. The Jewish New Year [late this week] is an emotionally vulnerable time. Yom Kippur [in two weeks], with the fresh historic memory it arouses, is even more delicate. But no one among the military and political top brass deluded himself that the story ended the day the aircraft violated, allegedly, Syrian airspace. On the Israeli side, the leadership is evidently surprising itself by its ability to impose restraint on the ministers and generals.... At times of deliberate obfuscation like now, however, even the most banal statement takes on a slightly greater significance."

II. "Absolute Silence"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (9/10): "What has been going on over the past few days among the top echelon in the country is so rare.... Syria is issuing threats. Television stations all over the Arab world are brimming with anger. Turkey is troubled.... And only the government leaders in Israel are keeping silent.... One may assume that the welcome silence of the weekend will not last long. The story will come out. If not here, then with the help of foreign reports. If not in the veteran media, then on the Internet. If not now, then on the eve of elections. Or the next coalition crisis, or on the eve of a round of appointments at the IDF General Staff, or at the next interview given by one of those in on the secret on a TV interview program. The generation of Israelis who took their secrets to their graves (or at least until they retired), has died,

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and in their stead has risen a generation which does not suffice with eulogies: It needs instant glory. If there is a headline, it will appear immediately. And if, after I have gone underground, a headline appears, let it be protected forever. This is the reason that these days all the journalists in the country have a problem sleeping. They would all be happy to be the first to publish. Mainly, they find it hard to bear the thought that they will be the second."

III. "Welcome to the Middle East"

Defense commentator Amir Oren wrote in *Ha'aretz* (9/9): "Israel has tripped itself up before with the boasting that accompanied its defeats of Arab countries, even when the defeats were justified.... After each achievement by the IDF comes a timeout, which the defeated use to grow stronger and tighten alliances. Syria has not buckled under, despite its weakness vis-a-vis Israel.... In an interview published in the current issue of the Israel Air Force journal, IAF Air Directorate Commander Brigadier General Yochanan Loker praised some of the IAF's abilities to strike its targets. These are indeed impressive, especially the IAF's superior intelligence and ability to surprise its targets and their defenses.

But their strategic impact is limited. It is very difficult to deliver a fatal blow to the will of a government, people, or organization to go on fighting until it achieves its political or religious goals. The present crisis may blow over, but the fragile nature of relations between Israel and Syria will continue threatening to ignite at any moment. Although war did not break out, joy is premature: No basic problem has been solved. To move ahead to a solution, talk, not silence, is needed."

IV. "The Syrian Riddle"

Senior op-ed writer Akiva Eldar commented in *Ha'aretz* (9/10): "Syria is playing a double game. On the one hand, it is dipping into Iran's arms caches, complementing what is lacking there with purchases from Russia, and sending its surpluses to Hezbollah. On the other hand, it voted in favor of the Arab League initiative, which offers Israel peace and normalized relations in return for occupied territory.... From Israel's point of view, the most important question is what will happen to the Arab consensus in the coming months.... According to Israeli intelligence analysts, Syrian patience will hold out until early 2009. Assad is counting on a Democratic White House lifting the embargo on Syria and convincing Israel to renew negotiations. By then, Syria will have completed its arms procurement program, and Iran may also have completed its nuclear program. On the other hand, Israel will not have completed development of the anti-missile technologies that the Defense Minister has been discussing. These same analysts believe that the Alawite regime in Damascus is not interested in becoming a pawn in an Iranian war for regional hegemony. But either way, before being drawn into a war, all means to prevent it must be sought. And in any case, no military operation -- not even a victory -- can take the place of a diplomatic agreement."

IV. "Syria Isn't Ready Yet"

Military correspondent Alex Fishman wrote in *Yediot Aharonot* (9/9): "Syria has a history of committing acts of terrorism by proxy. And if the Iranians become involved in this story, we can expect payback by means of a terror attack against Israeli and Jewish targets around the world. Hezbollah has sleeper cells in Europe, South America, and Africa, and they might try to attack embassies or Israeli commercial companies. The Syrians are not yet prepared for war. They are not going to do anything that might provoke a full-scale war. They will be operationally prepared only in 2009, with the completion of the major arms deal with Russia. In the meantime, they can promote terrorism in the territories -- mainly in Gaza. They are going to have a hard time setting Lebanon on fire against us because Hezbollah, for the time being, is not interested in having that happen."

VI. "Influence in the Mideast"

The Director of the Interdisciplinary Center's Global Research in International Affairs Center, columnist Barry Rubin, wrote in *The Jerusalem Post* (9/10): "Policy must be tough, cynical, and involve equal trade-offs, rather than proofs of good will or flattery designed to win friends. Iran knows that; America often does, and Europe usually doesn't. That's why flattering Mahmoud Abbas, showering money and arms on Fatah, and thinking one can turn the West Bank into a showcase of economic progress isn't going to work. Nor will persuading the Arab world that America and Europe care about the Palestinians, want to give them a state, and don't like Israel. A reasonable strategy requires showing how unprofitable it is to be an enemy while helping those on the other side only to the extent that they cooperate. It means not having to apologize but getting those who ignore your interests to apologize to you. It

requires taking into account regional realities rather than sentimentalizing them into morality plays. It includes not expecting to solve neatly problems which have no solution."

JONES